

Cult-proofing our children by Lloyd Robertson

In "The Tibetan Book on Living and Dying", Buddhist Master Sogyal Rinpoche approvingly describes the learning experience of a particular disciple. The disciple, we are told, was having difficulty learning a particular concept. He approached his "Master" who began throwing insults in his direction. In humility, he began crawling on the ground towards this guru but was met, first with pebbles and then by rocks thrown by the latter. He continued to crawl until he was within reach of the Master at which time he was bludgeoned by the guru's fists. Bloodied, we are told the disciple learned his lesson and continued on the path toward Buddhist "enlightenment".

Just what was the lesson that this disciple learned? Buddhists would probably say that he learned the "insignificance" of "self" or "ego" and, thereby, became more open to accepting his master's teachings. In other words, his mind became like an empty vessel which his master could then program as he saw fit.

A cult is any group that practices mind control on its members. The guru-disciple relationship is rife with that possibility. But there are many variations on this theme.

In 1977 Jim Jones, a minister of the Church of Christ (Disciples) received the prestigious Martin Luther King Jr. award for his work with San Francisco's poor. He also taught that the world was evil and that Christians should separate themselves from it. In 1978 he led nearly a thousand of his flock to Guyana where they began carving a new town out of the jungle. One member of his flock was the daughter of U.S. Congressman Leo Ryan. Ryan was killed when he attempted to spirit his daughter away. The young woman, wounded, escaped with the rest of Ryan's entourage.

Jones told his followers that this was a "sign from God" that they should "join Jesus in heaven". The children died first, babies were killed by squirting cyanide into their mouths with a syringe. Most of the 912 who died drank koolaid laced with the poison.

Congressman Ryan's daughter later joined the Moonies.

In a way, she represents the typical cult follower. Psychologist Eric Fromm has noted that many people wish to "escape from freedom". They cannot handle the responsibility that freedom brings. They wish to avoid responsibility for their own decisions. They want the responsibility for their own happiness removed from their shoulders. They want certainty and they want to be told what to do.

We can cult-proof our children by living according to eight principles of good parenting:

- 1) all children are worthy, valued and loved and this is shown daily in our actions;

2) children deserve to be raised in a secure environment free from both abuse and superstitious fears;

3) all children learn that they can succeed by doing socially useful things and that there is a role for each child in each family;

4) to be human is to be able to reason; we recognize that each child deserves to know reasons for decisions affecting them; and, we show respect to our children by discussing calmly, reaching agreements and, sometimes, compromising;

5) we actively seek out the opinions of our children and we take their opinions seriously;

6) we teach self-discipline by allowing children to experience the logical consequences of their actions. We do not cover up for them;

7) we are true to our word and live our lives consistently according to our beliefs; and,

8) we respect our children's right to be different and we don't "sweat the small stuff".